

Testimony of April Raczka, MS MFT  
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**SB 153 AN ACT PROVIDING SAFE HARBOR FOR EXPLOITED CHILDREN**  
Select Committee on Children, February 23, 2010

Good afternoon, my name is April Raczka and I am the Director of Sexual Assault Crisis Services of the Hartford and New Britain region. My organization provides free and confidential sexual assault counseling and advocacy to residents in a 43-town region which includes all of Hartford County plus the town of Plymouth and part of Tolland County.

I am also a family therapist, and in both roles I have a combined experience of over ten years experience working with children who have been victimized and sexually exploited. Our agency has worked with several cases involving adults and children who have been forced into prostitution. This is not often considered an option by children (or adults), and the reality is that children do not choose to be abused. A vast majority of those involved in trafficking are currently being sexually abused at the hands of those who have promised them refuge. If the abuse is not current they have been victims in the past. Many times victims have known no other life but that with which sex without true consent is considered normal. They have not had role models or anyone to protect them, and the systems that are meant to protect them have failed them.

I know this because I have worked personally with dozens of children and young women who have reported directly to me that they were sexually exploited in order to create income for their family. In many instances, those children are exploited by those who were also sexually assaulting them at home on a daily basis. As Director of the Hartford/New Britain regional Sexual Assault Crisis Services, my staff have reported several cases to me, some quite recently, in which adolescent males and females were exploited by their parents or foster parents.

I write this in effort to ask that these children are provided with the most comprehensive care and treatment rather than punishment. I ask that we as advocates for children, counselors and human beings can recognize this is not something a child or adolescent wants for themselves. They need help, desperately. For this reason, I ask that you support SB 153 AN ACT PROVIDING SAFE HARBOR FOR EXPLOITED CHILDREN. Rather than punish young victims of sexual exploitation, it is our job as adults, advocates, human beings to protect them and to get them the treatment they need to thrive and live healthier lives.

Thank you.

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